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ABSTRACT

Discrimination training in a specific, short-term, lay counseling program aimed at producing effective helpers is evaluated. Success of various lay training ventures appears to be related to the organization of specific programs with emphasis on core conditions. A week-long training program patterned after Carkhuff (1969b) included the conditions of empathy, regard, and genuineness; training in the action aspects of counseling; and experienced-based learning in interpersonal relations and communication skills. Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination was administered to the experimental group both before and immediately after their training experience. Each experimental subject nominated a control subject similar to him in age, education, vocation, interests, etc. There was also a 3rd random control group. The 3 groups were roughly equivalent before training, with the experimental group tending to do somewhat higher in level of discrimination ability. This group improved considerably after the training program, while both the matched control group and the random control group declined slightly. Thus, the study shows that at least on the discrimination variable, lay helpers can be quickly and effectively trained. (MA)

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DISCRIMINATION TRAINING WITH LAY COUNSELORS

There is a growing body of research evidence to support the claim that short-term, lay training programs can produce highly effective helpers (Carkhuff 1969b, 1968; Carkhuff, Kratochvil, & Friel, 1968; Truax & Lister, 1970). While certain problems exist with regard to the employment of lay counselors (Martin, 1971), the indications are that lay counselors can supply a large number of facilitative helpers which are so desperately needed at present.

Success of the various lay training ventures appears to be related to the organization of specific programs with emphasis on core conditions (Carkhuff, 1968; Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). The current study was an attempt to evaluate one aspect of such a specific, short-term, lay counseling program.

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 17 lay subjects took part in 30 hours of structured training in counseling. Subjects included 5 males and 12 females and ranged in age from 20-52. The subjects were from a wide variety of backgrounds including alcoholism counselors, housewives, probation officers, nurses, social workers, and psychologists. Education ranged from incomplete high school to graduate degrees, but none of the subjects had had any extensive training in counseling.

Training Program

The week-long program was patterned closely on the work of Carkhuff (1969b) and specific training in the core conditions of empathy, regard, and genuineness; training in the action aspects of counseling (confrontation, self-disclosure); and experience-based learning in interpersonal relations and communication skills.

Each morning was devoted to skill training on one of the core conditions. Subjects role played counseling sessions and then rated each other on 5-point scales as outlined by Carkhuff (1969b). Both

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audiotape and videotape feedback was provided to the participants. A communication workshop was held during one afternoon session, and the remaining afternoon sessions involved personal growth, T-group types of activities. In this way, the program attempted to develop specific skills related to counseling, but to also develop improved overall interpersonal relations.

Index of Discrimination

Improvement was assessed through pre- and post-test measures of discrimination. Carkhuff (1969b) contends that an essential helper trait is the ability to discriminate facilitative and action-oriented conditions in the counseling situation. To assess the presence of this variable, Carkhuff (1969b) has developed an Index of Discrimination which is comprised of 16 helpee stimulus expressions. For each helpee stimulus, 4 possible helper responses are provided. Carkhuff states that these responses are all taken from live counseling sessions and are designed to "cross level of helper-offered facilitative conditions with level of helper action orientation and activity"(1969a, p. 126).

For the purposes of the present study, Carkhuff's Index of Discrimination was divided into 2 matched forms, each having 8 helpee stimulus statements.

Procedure

The Index of Discrimination was administered to the experimental group both before and immediately after their training experience. Each experimental subject was asked to nominate someone in his life who was very similar to him in age, education, vocation, interests, attitudes, and so on. This group then served as a matched control group. Finally, a third random control group was also given pre- and post-test administration of the Index of Discrimination.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Overall comparison results appear in Table 1. As indicated by the data, the three groups were roughly equivalent before training, with the experimental group tending to be somewhat higher in level of discrimination ability. This group then improved considerably over the training program, while both the matched control group and the random control group declined slightly.

These changes in the experimental group were significant as indicated by the analysis of variance in Table 2 ($F = 6.95$; $p < .01$).

The quality of discrimination responses is indicated by the mean discrimination score per response (Table 1). Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) indicate that to be minimally effective or facilitative, a helper must be

able to function at an overall level 3. Helpers functioning below level 3 are detracting from the helping process; those scoring above level 3 are highly facilitative and generally add much to the progress of counseling.

While all three groups were initially relatively adept at discrimination, with mean scores per response being at, or near 3, the two control groups did not make any gains, while the experimental group reached a final mean score per response of 3.64.

The results of this study indicate that, at least on the one variable of discrimination, lay helpers can be quickly trained up to an acceptable and effective level of performance, in a relatively short period of time.

TABLE 1

Mean Levels of Discrimination

	Experimental Group		Matched Control Group		Random Control Group	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Mean Discrimination Score over 8 responses	24.62	29.15	22.18	21.11	23.74	23.38
Mean Discrimination Score per response	3.08	3.64	2.77	2.64	2.97	2.92

Note: Higher scores denote higher levels of discrimination.

TABLE 2

Analysis of Variance for Pre- and Post-test Differences

Source	df	ms	F	P<
Treatment	2	157.43	6.95	.01
Within	48	22.64		
Total	50			

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